

CNET Builder.com Live!  
New Orleans, LA  
12/7-9/98

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The conference was quite worthwhile with quite a few valuable sessions. We also had some excellent vendor contacts.

#### Highlights:

- [Infoseek](#) is marketing their search engine for use on web sites. NASA is already using it in several locations. Cost is low, less than \$1K, and it has an excellent feature set, including the ability to search referenced databases as well as HTML pages. We will be checking out a demo version.
- [Netscape](#) passed out floppies containing Gecko, their next browser engine. They claim up to 10X faster rendering speeds for tables and other elements.
- Macromedia has released [Dreamweaver 2.0](#), a cross-platform web authoring and site management tool which looks very promising. The changes include the capability to visually author static and dynamic pages and ensure the accurate html coding. It also offers good table editing and the ability to post Flash contents. We have demo versions.
- GoLive was pushing [CyberStudio 3](#), a Mac-only competitor for Dreamweaver, which we will also evaluate.
- Keynote and other sessions had a lot of emphasis on e-commerce.
- [NetObjects Fusion 4.0](#) has lots of capabilities for global site changes (styles, etc.)
- Jakob Nielson spoke on navigation and usability. He, like many others, emphasized short download times. He discussed the concept of localized micro-navigation (hop sideways as well as going up and down a hierarchy). A user wants to be able to answer 3 questions #1, where am I, #2, where can I go, and #3, where have I been. Browsers fail to answer these questions adequately. The challenge is to institute standards for navigation support across browsers. He has an excellent site on usability at [www.useit.com](http://www.useit.com).
- Michael Dunn gave an excellent talk on Interface Design Elements. He encourages a balanced approach that empowers users and supports their goals for visiting your site. He, like many others at the conference, believes that most sites are best advised to design to the 3.0 level of browsers. Pages can be designed to automatically determine a user's browser, level and platform and then be tailored accordingly.
- Nathan Shedroff gave some excellent insights into the nature and value of interactivity. His site, <http://www.nathan.com/thoughts/>, is a good source for ideas.
- Louis Rosenfeld spoke on Information Architecture. He emphasized that users have

differing information needs and differing styles of obtaining information. He urges organizing a site for both easy searching and browsing. We purchased a copy of his book on the topic, which is available in Den's office.

- Many practical tips were offered at a session on Designing for Performance and Compatibility, plus a javascript to pre-load your main page while viewing a splash page. [Project Cool](#) is a rich resource for ideas, scripts, etc. I especially liked the insights offered on where to use and not use GIFs and JPEGs.
- Building a Better User Interface: This discussion opens with categorization of which types of audiences one might wish to appeal to and necessary objectives in successful web design. Also discussed is writing code for re-use.
- How Much Are Browser Incompatibilities Costing You? Approximately 25% of a web developer's time is spent adapting their web pages to successfully load on different types of browsers. Key members of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) discuss their efforts in developing established standards for interpreting Web-based content. Netscape promises to comply with the core list of standards set out by W3C in their next edition of the web browser, Gecko. For more information visit the [Web Standards Project](#).
- Web Mining for Profit: Intelligently Using Web Traffic: Discussion of evaluating web traffic to find out which groups of people are coming to your site, how they originally found it, which pages appeal to them, and when they think it takes too long to download your web page. Web mining also help find broken links in your web pages, and determine whether people liked the site enough to come back to revisit it. Briefly discussed is storing web mining data in a database for later analysis.
- One session attended addressed designing for accessibility. The [Web Accessibility Initiative's](#) Page Authoring Guidelines were reviewed. [Bobby](#), a site for analyzing pages for accessibility was demoed. We will be using it to validate our new site.
- A panel on E-Commerce (Paul Meyer, CNET CEO; Chris Larson E-Loan CEO; Andrew Beebe, The Springfield Project) concluded the following:
  - It's important to maintain a certain level of control over a web development project and striking the right balance of centralized versus team management will help ensure success
  - Focus on the applications and customers, rather than the
  - Technology must be in the top tier of an organization, not relegated to a supporting function
- [Dynamic Object Model \(DOM\)](#) is a new WC3 recommendation developed to ensure that chunks of content in a document are displayed in the same way. DOM is an API for HTML and XML documents that defines a logical structure and a way to access the object. It was stated that scripting will still be a problem since Netscape and Microsoft use different syntax to define their element

- Mikkel Aaland, noted author, spoke on using Photoshop and Image Ready software to create, optimize and prepare images for use on the web. He also demonstrated how to create web graphics that download fast and contain browser-safe colors.
- Rakesh Agrawai, of the Washington Post, and Jamie Hutt, of the Minneapolis Star Tribune, gave a lively session on Designing the Interface to the Database. They explained how to use tables, navigational aids, and other techniques to make it easier for users to find their way through the complex morass of information stored in your behind-the-scenes database files.
- Animation tips — plug ins are not consumer ready
  - Flash is good but requires a plug in
  - Recommend using Quicktime with Media layers — it will make animated Gifs look like streaming video and is the only cross browser option for media
  - Shockwave generates huge files
  - If you do use plug ins — let the user know how big and how long it will take to download
- General Site development tips (George Olson, Glen Davis)
  - Try to keep homepage small — 20-30Kb — if larger, use a splash page and load images at that time — can preload images as single pixel images
  - Text is 1/3<sup>rd</sup> larger on Windows machines than Macs, however Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) will resolve this discrepancy
  - Push things onto the server whenever possible
  - Important to consider infrastructure up front for maintainability
  - Nested tables with primarily text are a problem — slow to load
  - If use animation, limit the area that changes
  - Only have approx. 30 seconds to get a users attention and communicate to them what to do (ideally 15 sec)
  - User ALT tags for everything — will help eliminate need to have "text only" versions
  - Reuse graphic files whenever possible, resize or create collage like images (Andy Warhol example) to reduce image loading requirement
  - Offer media files in multiple formats (label w/size & download req.)
  - Use JPEG format for photos and GIF for graphics

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